



The Christian News-Letter

Edited by
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No. 79

APRIL 30TH, 1941

DEAR MEMBER,

The tides of war are just now running against us. The British people are reacting by showing, as the Prime Minister tersely said in the House of Commons, "all those qualities of stability and phlegm when things are not going well that have made us what we are and have carried us this far." That is a solid standby. But there is more. Trial is always opportunity. By depriving us of the supports on which we mistakenly rely it recalls us to the unshakable foundation of our hope. It is in such times that we learn to put our faith in God, the Ground of all that is, the Lord of history, actively and redemptively present in every situation, ready to respond to those who trust Him. Readers of the News-Letter know what important issues for mankind I believe to be at stake in this war. But still more important for the future of humanity is the question whether the ultimate thing in the universe is material might and the pride of human power, or the living Spirit of God—Creator and Redeemer, Source and Defender of truth and right. Our present difficulties will turn to our lasting good if they compel us to face and settle in our souls that crucial issue.

THE NAZIS AND THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Germans are at the present time most anxious to influence Roman Catholic opinion in France and Spain, and have been claiming that the Vatican has no religious objection to Nazi policy and expansion. This was met by a strong protest and measured denunciation of the Nazi treatment of the Church in the Vatican wireless, followed by further broadcasts in the same sense.

In the first broadcast it was stated that, so far from the Holy See regarding the religious situation in Germany as satisfactory, the truth was exactly the opposite, and that the religious situation in Germany was in fact pathetic. An enumeration of the attacks on the Church followed. A ministerial order requires that young men who feel the vocation to Holy Orders must forego this desire and place their services at the disposal of the nation. Monasteries and convents have been dissolved and religious institutions closed down. The development and maintenance of Christian life are made difficult. Demands are made that baptism should be postponed till the age of twenty-one, and that up to that time children should grow up without any religious instruction, and be subject to Nazi education. Lectures are given not only denouncing Christian doctrine but condemning charity and pity, and maintaining that sterilising and the putting to death of cripples, babies and old people should be obligatory under a well conceived State administration. The menace of a national religion, enforced with all the power and resources of the State becomes greater. It would be one based solely on the Führer's will. The broadcast concludes with an appeal that Roman Catholic Germany should wake up and realise the pagan tendencies which are spreading everywhere.

An extremely courageous and outspoken pastoral letter by Archbishop Groeber of Freiburg-in-Bresgau is published in *The Tablet* of April 12th. He raises in the plainest terms the crucial issue in the following words:—

“You know it: the Catholic religion is by no means only a firm supernatural faith, only Holy Mass, Sacraments and prayer. It is also virile defence, that is to say, courageous championing if need be, such as the examples of Christ and His Apostles and of the other great Christian fighters prove to us. Religion embraces man as a whole: his reason and his will, his memory and his emotions, but also—let us take it to heart—his character. Christian character, however, demands that one openly and with a raised visor champions one’s supreme and most holy values without fear and without treachery, and stands erect in honesty and loyalty, both as an individual and as a citizen.”

After describing the attacks on the monastic schools and other religious institutions the letter continues :

“Two spiritual worlds are now facing each other in Greater Germany, and it must be said, unfortunately, that they act on each other like fire and water. . . . Let it be said to my grief that the rift in the German people has become undeniable. I myself had hopes, under the influence of a pardonable optimism, that at least the present terrible clash of arms would bring about a change. I had deceived myself. It almost seems to me that the rejection and shelving of Germans who are convinced Christians is being carried out even more openly than in the years before the war. . . .

“The anti-Christians do not in wartime take any drastic measures in their struggle for the soul of the child. But what will happen after the war? Serenity, without defence, is good in the face of personal injustice, but not when the salvation of souls is at stake. . . . It would be sinful to remain inactive while enemies break unhindered into the children’s souls.”

CONDITIONS IN ALSACE AND LORRAINE

¶ A report has reached us from a trustworthy source about conditions in Alsace and Lorraine. It opens a window into the tragedies which are taking place in hundreds of thousands of individual lives throughout the occupied countries in Europe. As soon as the armistice was concluded the Germans at once treated both provinces as German territory. About 100,000 Alsatians, who had taken refuge in Unoccupied France, did not return to Alsace. A large number however went back of their own accord, and others were forced to return under strong pressure. Teachers were sent for training to the Reich and hundreds of German teachers came to Alsace to drill the children into Nazi thought and behaviour. In Lorraine there were wholesale expulsions. Many were given only an hour’s notice and German families were settled in their homes and took possession of their belongings and food supplies even before the owners had left. A doctor was told to leave all his instruments on the table because his successor would be there in an hour and would need them. In Alsace the expulsions were not on the same scale, but large numbers of individuals were visited by the Gestapo and compelled to leave their homes in half an hour. People were driven out without any opportunity of communicating with other members of the family who, if absent at the time, would return in the evening to find the home broken up without any means of knowing what had happened to those whom they loved. No correspondence is permitted between those who have been expelled and those who have been left behind so that on both sides people are left in complete ignorance about the fate of other members of their families.

It is reported that while at the beginning the strongest opposition to the German invaders came from the middle class the bitterness has now spread among the whole population. A belief in ultimate deliverance through the collapse of Germany is general amongst the grown up population, but deep concern is felt about the disintegrating influence on the children. Nazi methods of denunciation make it dangerous for parents to counteract in any way the influence exerted on the children in the schools. It is to be remembered in regard to the situation in Alsace that the population has strong Christian traditions. One of the difficulties between Alsace and the Third Republic was that the

latter had stood so strongly for "laicism." Alsace was finally allowed to keep its confessional schools and no separation of Church and State took place. In these circumstances the German anti-Christian propaganda and the immediate separation of Church and State following on the occupation have aroused strong feeling. Never has Alsace been so violently anti-German and so sincerely pro-French as it is at the present time.

RUTHLESSNESS

A report in the press attributes the following remarks to a member of Parliament holding a minor office in the Government: "Human nature being what it is, it will not be possible to ignore the cry for retaliation indefinitely. And if ever we do decide upon retaliation, then heaven help the Germans." I do not mention the name of the speaker because an abbreviated report may misrepresent what he said. I merely take the words as they stand as representing a view that is probably widely held.

The phrase that illuminates the whole situation like a flash is, "human nature being what it is." The fundamental truth about human nature is that it is not something that *is*. It is something plastic, capable of sinking below the level of the beasts, or of rising to divine heights.

Progress, man's distinctive mark alone,
Not God's and not the beasts' : God is, they are,
Man partly is, and wholly hopes to be.

Dr. Rauschnig, in the striking book *The Beast from the Abyss*, which I mentioned a fortnight ago and again strongly advise everyone to read who wants to understand the deeper issues underlying the present conflict, maintains that the war is only one manifestation of an upsurge of the primitive elements in human nature. In all sorts of directions there are signs of a strong craving to throw off the restraints of civilisation and the burdens and obligations of a higher humanity. The demon of destruction, which civilisation has held in check, has broken loose. Men are casting aside the lessons and discipline of centuries and returning to the worship of heathen deities like Moloch, who delights in human sacrifices. Weary of its long upward march humanity is in danger of throwing down its packs, scrapping its traditions and returning to barbarism.

What fools we are to imagine that we can have it both ways. We say in one breath that this is a war in defence of civilisation; and in another mood we are ready to cast every standard of civilisation away, as though there were any other way of defending civilisation than by having it and living it. The Germans, we say, are ruthless, let us outdo them in ruthlessness; and we are too stupid to see that in saying it we have gone over to barbarism.

Barbarism has today taken the sword and has therefore to be met with the sword. If we accept that necessity, we are committed to the military measures required to defeat the enemy. The methods of modern warfare are so horrible that their use even in the form of military counter-action must wound the Christian conscience. Lay opinion is not sufficiently informed to judge of the measures necessary for military victory and this decision must, within broad limits, remain the responsibility of the Government and their military advisers. But if the measures adopted go beyond the strictest military necessity and inflict wanton and needless suffering, and still more if popular opinion demands retaliation for retaliation's sake, human nature will have taken the fatal downward turn. We shall ourselves have become barbarians and it will make little difference to civilisation who wins the war.

This will seem to some of you to be walking on a knife-edge. It is—but that is only another way of saying that life has to be lived dangerously. The position of the thorough-going pacifist is intelligible; if war does drag us down the slippery slope till we let every standard go, he will prove in the end to be right. But it is better to try to walk on the

knife-edge than to give way to the illusion of supposing that we can have it both ways and wage war without being involved in its stern necessities or, on the other hand, to surrender ourselves to the demon of destruction which, by deluding us into thinking that nothing matters but those necessities, would involve us all in universal ruin.

THE TRUE PACIFISM

Dr. Rauschnig in the book already mentioned devotes a page or two to praise of the British tradition of compromise. He points out that it rests on the practical recognition that no man can be solely and entirely in the right. No individual and no party is in possession of absolute truth. This attitude has deeper roots than is commonly recognised. It is inherent in the Christian view of man as a created and dependent being. Absolute truth and absolute right belong to God alone. Christians cannot bow the knee to any human absolute. The inexhaustible wealth of the world that God has created cannot be comprehended in any single abstract system.

This attitude finds expression in a recent editorial in the *Friends' Ambulance Unit Chronicle*, the following paragraphs from which are worth quoting:

"It is easy to say that the Churches are a failure and that the best thing we can do is to scrap them altogether. It is easy to condemn all war, past and present, as unjustifiable. It makes things so much simpler if you look at them like that. But it has one fatal disadvantage. If you know anything of human nature or history, you cannot really believe that it is true. It requires a deeper faith, and greater humility, to face the facts. To believe we have the truth, and at the same time to believe that those who think otherwise may have the truth as well; to admit that although it is our duty to protest, it may be the duty of others to put us into prison for it; to confess that our persecutors, no less than we, are vessels of a purpose greater than either we or they, is neither simple, flattering, nor, on the face of it, logical. Yet it would seem to be the case. . . . Humility, charity, imagination are the very essence of pacifism; without them it becomes nothing but a body of opinion. It is not a living method any more; it is another sect, and of these there are enough already."

Yours sincerely,

J. H. Oldham

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